



GLASS ACT: Dodd celebrates win

Dodd's triumph well worth wait

WELSHMAN Stephen Dodd began the new European golf tour season by ending a 15-year wait for his first title.

The 38-year-old from Cardiff held off the challenge of Ryder Cup Dane, Thomas Bjorn, to win the Volvo China Open in Shanghai by three shots.

Dodd had started 166 tournaments – since turning pro in 1989 – before his maiden win.

The closest the 38-year-old had previously come to victory was second place at the 2001 North West of Ireland Open.

Justin Rose fired a one-under-par 71 on the final day of the Casio World Open to secure a top-10 finish in Kagoshima, Japan.

Rose finished the tournament in ninth place, on seven under, five shots adrift of American winner David Small, who also closed with a 71.

Battling Colin Montgomerie made a late surge to claim a share of 12th place.

Hickman has a gold strike in Oz

JAMES HICKMAN struck gold for Britain in the men's 100 metres butterfly on the final day of the Melbourne leg of the FINA World Cup.

The City of Manchester Aquatics swimmer touched in 51.56 ahead of Russian rival Nikolay Skvortsov in 51.64 and New Zealand's Corney Swanepoel took the bronze in 51.67.

Hickman was forced to settle for silver behind Skvortsov in the 200m event and took the bronze medal in the 50m distance.

Hickman was just outside the medals in the 100m backstroke when he came home in 3.39 to take fourth spot. Gold went to Aussie Matt Welsh in 51.38, Ba Randall of the USA was second and Aaron Peirsol, also of the USA, third.

Vaughan hails match-winner as one for future

SUPER IAN'S A REAL BELL-TER



SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND won by 5 wickets	
ZIMBABWE	
B Taylor b Wharf	17
S Matsikenyi c Pietersen b Gough	14
V Sibanda b Wharf	6
D Ebrahim b Giles	45
M Vermeulen run out	11
T Banton not out	5
E Chigumbura c Wood b Anderson	52
T Panyangara lbw b Giles	1
Useyta not out	11
D Hondo run out	7
C Mpofu b Gough	6
E Gough c Hondo b Wharf	25
TOTAL (49.0 overs)	185
Bowling: Gough 8.0-0-34-3, Anderson 10-1-38-1, Wharf 10-2-33-2, Collingwood 10-0-41-4, Giles 10-0-36-2.	
ENGLAND	
V Solanki c Panyangara b Hondo	7
Bell c Taylor b Wharf	75
M Makhaya c Chigumbura b Matsikenyi	65
A Strauss c & b Matsikenyi	8
K Pietersen not out	27
P Collingwood run out	1
J Jones not out	7
E Gough not out	10
TOTAL (47.4 overs)	187
Bowling: T Panyangara 6-0-32-0, C Mafetu 9-4-13-2, D Hondo 6-0-26-1, E Chigumbura 2-0-18-0, Useyta 10-0-39-0, S Matsikenyi 10-0-33-2, B Taylor 4-0-14-1.	

RING-A-DING: Bell coolly flicks one away during his match-winning 75

off when Wilko returns

Jonny's been out for the three games so I've happily done it.

"It's been a great experience for me and I've learnt a lot over the past few weeks and I'm sure when Jonny is back he'll be in and the lads will get behind him.

"He'll find we've come on in the last three weeks and there are a lot of positives to take out of the autumn internationals.

Effort

"There have been some great individual performances with a few people putting themselves on the international scene in a big way.

"I'm happy with the effort of the boys over the three weeks and we've just got to keep building, it's a simple as that."

In another classic England v Australia clash, both Jason Robinson and coach Andy Robinson experienced defeat in their new roles for the first time as Matt Giteau kicked the Wallabies to victory.

Two penalties in the final 10 minutes ruined what had been a stirring second-half display from England.

They had come back from 15-0 down to score 19 unanswered points in a blistering 15 minute spell.

Tries from Lewis Moody, Josh Lewsey and Mark Cueto put England in front for the first time, but just as Wilkinson broke Aussie hearts in the World Cup final a year earlier, this time it was Giteau's turn.

Before then, England had suffered with Charlie Hodgson failing to hit a barn door with his goalkicking, while Henry Paul was substituted after just 24 minutes in a miserable first-half performance.

But the new team spirit was almost as good as the old during the fightback. The only thing missing was the win at the end.

Kill

Captain Robinson added: "We know that this is all about winning, so it is very disappointing that we couldn't shut up shop for the last five minutes.

"This is something we'll learn from. We weren't good enough, but we'll move on from it and learn how to kill off a game."

IAN BELL helped England forget the storm over their visit to Zimbabwe by guiding them to victory when they finally managed a game of cricket yesterday.

The Warwickshire man scored a cool 75 on his one-day debut to ease the tourists to a comfortable five-wicket win and earn praise from skipper Michael Vaughan.

Bell switched England's focus back onto cricket after a week of debate over the tour and fears the first match could see demonstrations or be used for political gain by President Robert Mugabe's government.

Bell shrugged off the early loss of fellow opener Vikram Solanki and helped forge a century stand with Vaughan, ending any hopes Zimbabwe had of defending their 195.

Bell's superb innings followed his equally impressive 70 on his Test debut against the West Indies at The Oval and established him as next in line for a five-day slot.

Rescued

England gained the initiative over Zimbabwe's weakened side early on with Glamorgan's Alex Wharf and veteran Darren Gough claiming two early wickets apiece.

Eton Chigumbura then rescued the home side from humiliation with 52 off 47 balls before he was caught in the deep with six overs to go, just as Zimbabwe were looking to accelerate.

After England lost Solanki, Bell and Vaughan combined to add 111 in 29 overs until the captain pulled Stuart Matsikenyi's occasional leg-spin straight to deep mid-wicket.

England then almost made a hash of chasing just 63 from the final 20 overs. Bell attempted to

cut a wide delivery from Brendan Taylor and was caught behind and then Andrew Strauss fell four overs later to a superb return catch from Matsikenyi.

Paul Collingwood was run out attempting a sharp single and England's composure seemed to visibly wilt.

Following that, Geraint Jones and Kevin Pietersen, another debutant, apparently lost all ability to judge a single.

Both players could have been run out before Pietersen finished the game in style by driving down the ground for four.

Skipper Vaughan praised Bell, saying: "He's very composed, he's got an array of shots and he's certainly one for the future."

"Both times when he's had his debut I've been out in the middle with him and from what I've seen from 22 yards away I think he's certainly someone we're going to see a lot more of."

"We felt he deserved the opportunity for the way he's played, not only this year, but the way he's also played in practice."

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SERIOUSLY
football

Clint defends brassed-off Blues supporters

IN LIKE CLINT:
Morrison
heads the opener

Cap fits for teen star Gaz

■ Burnley 1 Millwall 0

A BRIGHT international future is being predicted for the teenage defender who has turned Burnley into the Championship's mean machine.

Steve Cotterill's team have not leaked a goal in three league games since 18-year-old Gary Cahill arrived on loan from Aston Villa's reserves.

And Cahill has already convinced defensive partner Frank Sinclair that he is a star in the making.

"I really have been very impressed," said Sinclair.

"I played alongside John Terry at Chelsea and I can tell you he was not a patch on this lad at the same age."

"I don't see why he won't play for England if he keeps improving. I'll be surprised if he doesn't."

Chance

Remember that he had not even played a first team game before he came here and it's a big step up.

"Our manager took a chance and it's paid off."

Sinclair's experience and the aerial ability of Cahill and Michael Duff were needed as Millwall mounted a desperate late bid to wipe out Robbie Blake's 61st-minute penalty.

The spot-kick was given for handball against defender Mark Phillips.

After that, Millwall's player-boss Dennis Wise - out with a calf injury - went route one with the long throw-ins of substitute Adrian Serioux.

"They were like exocets," said Cotterill. "I'm just glad he wasn't warmed up properly because that probably took a couple of yards off his distance."

FANS ARE RIGHT TO BOO IIS

CLINTON MORRISON stuck up for Birmingham fans after boss Steve Bruce slammed their reaction as the club's depressing start to the season continued.

Bruce was angry when supporters booted off his players after they stretched their wait for a second Premiership home win well into a fourth month.

He said: "We need the supporters to help us, we are not ready for all the expectation and hype.

"I thought it was very, very harsh for them to boo us."

But Morrison, who did his best to lift the gloom with his first Premiership goal of the season, said he understood the fans' bitter dissatisfaction.

"We finished 10th last season and if you look at our players compared to them, we should have won," he said.

Work

"The fans have a right to show their frustration. With the quality we have, we should not be in this position."

"They saw the way we played in the first half and are wondering why we couldn't play like that in the second. No one can put their finger on it."

At least fit-again Morrison found Emile Heskey an inspirational partner.

The duo threatened several more goals after the Republic of Ireland star's opener after nine minutes.

But the Blues faded badly and the summer's big-spenders have netted only once in five top-flight home games.

"We have to keep together and work harder on the training pitch to put things right," Morrison added.

"I was happy to play well but disappointed we didn't get three points. In the first-half, we played some brilliant stuff.

"It's going to be hard for me to take

by TIM GRAY

Birmingham 1
Norwich 1

over from Mikael (Forsell) because he was a bit special last season.

"If I can get into double figures I will be pleased, considering I've missed 13 or 14 games through injury."

"Emile and I looked good together. It was great to play with him and I was disappointed he didn't score because he deserved to."

Norwich - Birmingham's victims in the First Division play-off final three seasons ago - looked ordinary in the first half as they sought to build on their first Premiership victory against Southampton the previous week.

But when Leon McKenzie came on as a sub, they lived up and deserved what boss Nigel Worthington regarded as a good point, given to them by Darren Huckerby's fifth goal of the season.

Ironically, Huckerby was playing deeper and wider when he scored - to accommodate a man carrying a special burden.

It was McKenzie who accidentally smashed into the face of team-mate Damien Francis in training last Thursday, sidelining the in-form midfielder with cheekbone damage.

McKenzie said: "It was a freak incident. My elbow caught him wrong and I am deeply sorry because he has been in great form. *"Hopefully, he'll be back in a couple of weeks."*

WHAT A DAZZLER:
Huckerby celebrates
Norwich's vital equaliser

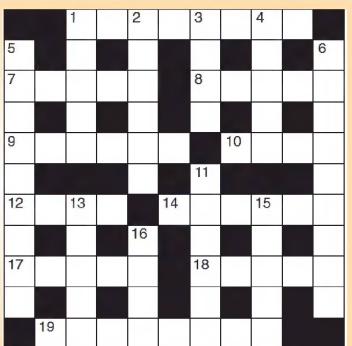
SPORTWORD

ACROSS

- Welsh rugby's "Scarlets" (8)
- Scottish horse racing venue (5)
- Birmingham City manager (5)
- James Surrey and England fast bowler (6)
- 10 and 14 across. A former name of Tim Henman's sport (4,6)
- Greg boxer who became WBA heavyweight champion in 1984 (4)
- See 10 across.
- Quest, Grand National winner in 1996 (5)
- Stephen Tour de France winner in 1987 (5)
- Simon former Australian cricket all-rounder (1,7)

1. Mark speedway World champion in 2000 (5)
2. Venue of the 2004 Olympic Games (6)
3. Vale Welsh rugby club (4)
4. Davies, British female golfer born in Coventry in 1963 (5)
5. home of West Ham United (5,4)
6. Titans, American football team (9)
11. Coetzee, boxer who became WBA heavyweight champion in 1983 (6)
13. Coventry City, Wimbledon, Cardiff City and Wales manager (5)
15. Andy former Scotland scrum-half (5)
16. Amir boxing silver medallist at 2 down (4)

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5 FOR FUN

- Who won his first snooker tournament in three years when he beat Stephen Maguire in this year's British Open final?
- Which county will Pakistan pace bowler Shoaib Akhtar play for next season?
- Which footballer's autobiography Addicted recounts his problems with alcohol?
- Which football club are nicknamed the "Glovers" and play at Huish Park?
- Which All Blacks outside-half scored 45 points against Japan in the 1995 World Cup - only to be dropped for the next international?

ANSWERS: See page 65

TEAMS

BIRMINGHAM: Maik Taylor, Melchiot (Gronkjaer 45), Cunningham, Upson, Clapham, Johnson, Savage, Anderton, Dunn (Clemente 76), Morrison (Yorke 79), Heskey, Subs: Martin Taylor, Vaesen.

NORWICH: Green, Edworthy, Fleming, Charlton, Drury, Bentley, Mulryne, Holt (Helvey 58), Brennan (McKenzie 54), Svensson, Huckerby. Subs: Jonson, Ward, Doherty. REF: G Poll.

Coca-Cola LEAGUE

1 action round-up

BARNESLEY 1 BLACKPOOL 0

BARNESLEY assistant boss Andy Ritchie hailed the superb 25-yard strike from Jacob Burns that snatched three points against Blackpool.

"It was an excellent strike," enthused Ritchie. "I keep telling him to have more strikes on goal – not only him but also the other midfielders."

Blackpool boss Colin Hendry said: "The ball swerved and just dipped at the last minute."

"I thought both goalkeepers had outstanding games and we didn't deserve to lose the match."

CHESTERFIELD 1 SWINDON 0

ASSISTANT manager Lee Richardson was more than satisfied with Chesterfield's victory against a team that rates highly.

Wayne Allison scored the only goal of the game, and Richardson said: "In my opinion Swindon, along with Luton, are the best team in this division."

"But this was the first time since I've been here that we've gone into a game with our players quietly confident, and that's a sign of how far I think we've come."

BRADFORD 1 OLDHAM 3

COLIN TODD believes 10-man Bradford only had themselves to blame for this home defeat.

Two goals from Neil Kilkenny and a Chris Killen strike secured victory for Oldham.

Dean Windass had equalised for Bradford, who had Nicky Summerbee sent off for stamping.

Manager Todd said: "We were just getting our momentum going when Nicky was sent off, but before we could reorganise they scored their second and that killed us."

HARTLEPOOL 3 BOURNEMOUTH 2

NEALE COOPER saluted his Hartlepool side's never-say-die attitude as they snatched victory from the jaws of defeat.

Goals in the last two minutes from Michael Nelson and Andy Appleby sealed a dramatic win after Derek Holmes and Brian Stock had put Bournemouth 2-1 up.

Cooper said: "We always tell the players to keep going for 90 minutes, and this game showed why. We made hard work of it."

Chris Westwood scored Hartlepool's opener.

BRISTOL CITY 1 SHEFF WED 4

WEDNESDAY boss Paul Sturrock feels his side are learning to be a force in League One.

Goals from Adam Proudflock (2), Chris Brunt and Patrick Collins saw off 10-man Bristol City, whose consolation came from Scott Murray.

Sturrock said: "When I arrived a number of players didn't seem to know what to do when the opposition had the ball."

"Now we're closing people down and stopping crosses."

Danny Coles was sent off for City.

HUDDERSFIELD 1 WREXHAM 2

PETER JACKSON was disappointed with Huddersfield's display in their home defeat to Wrexham, but insists his players can turn things around.

Andy Holt opened the scoring for the visitors and, although Danny Schofield hit an equaliser, Chris Armstrong won it from the penalty spot.

Jackson said: "I still believe in my players. A section of fans were on my back and having a go at the players who were having an off day, but we'll bounce back."

HULL 2 BRENTFORD 0

HULL manager Peter Taylor was keen to praise opponents Brentford following his side's win at the KC Stadium.

Two superb goals from Northern Ireland international Stuart Elliott sealed City's victory against a Bees side that was taken to penalties in the FA Cup against Bristol City less than 48 hours earlier.

Taylor said: "It was a very hard game and I was impressed by Brentford – and you'd never have thought they'd played two days ago."

LUTON 1 DONCASTER 1

MIKE NEWELL warned Luton fans not to expect a goal feast every week after his side conceded a late equaliser.

The League One leaders opened the scoring through a Kevin Nicholls free-kick, but Neil Roberts nicked a point for Rovers.

Newell said: "Things have been going our way lately."

"But the problem is when you're scoring three, four or five goals, people expect you to do that every week, and it's not going to happen."

STOCKPORT 0 WALSALL 1

PAUL MERSON could scarcely conceal his delight and pride after Walsall secured their first away win of the season.

Darren Wrack's solitary strike won it for the Saddlers.

And former England star Merson said: "It was a great away win for us. We had a game-plan and stuck to it, and it worked a treat."

"It wasn't great entertainment but I'm very proud of the lads."

"The win takes the pressure off a bit and moves us up the table."

TORQUAY 1 COLCHESTER 3

COLCHESTER manager Phil Parkinson paid his side the ultimate compliment after watching them stroll to victory at Torquay.

Craig Fagan hit a brace before Martin Gritten pulled one back for Torquay from the penalty spot.

However, Richard Garcia's header sealed the points for the Us.

"It was as comfortable an away win as you could get," said Parkinson. "Getting the first goal was all important. After that I thought there would only be one winner."

TRANMERE 2 MK DONS 0

BRIAN LITTLE insisted the result was all that mattered for his Tranmere side.

Rovers claimed the points thanks to second-half goals from Paul Hall and Theo Whitmore.

And Little said: "You get games when results become very important and this was one."

"We took a bit of time to settle and never produced any free-flowing football. They hung in there and gave us a fright. But we stepped it up in the second half."

SERIOUSLY football

England rookie hands a

SHAUN'S

by BILL THORNTON

Man City 2
A Villa 0

WHEN it came to the sublime skills usually associated with the stars of South America, England's Shaun Wright-Phillips had plenty.

Sadly for Aston Villa, Colombian Juan Pablo Angel was bottom of the class.

With City cruising towards a second successive win for the first time in 18 months, Angel blew his big chance to give Villa a late reprieve.

David James saved his poor penalty – then the striker tamely headed the rebound over a gaping net.

And it was such a contrast to Wright-Phillips' trickery, pace and shooting prowess – qualities that had the big Eastlands crowd buzzing with anticipation every time he was on the ball.

The City star's left-foot rocket followed a rare Premiership strike by Jon Macken, goals which put City into the top 10.

And James was left drooling at the development of his young team-mate who, according to boss Kevin Keegan, is destined to make a long-lasting contribution to the England team.

Debate

James said: "In training, he's a pain in the a**e! He runs rings around people and scores lots of goals. But he's hungry and he's enjoying his football."

"There was a moment in the second half where he chased down a loose ball and then went round four players. It was the sort of thing you expect Brazilians and the top Spanish players to be doing.

"How good he is and can become, I don't really know. He's got the support of the team and off the field, the support of a decent family, so he's got everything there for him."

Keegan, who recently described Wright-Phillips as "the best young player I have ever worked with", didn't want to join the debate on when he will start England matches.

But he was positive about one aspect of the midfielder's international future.

"Shaun is conducting the debate about his England prospects out on the pitch every week," said Keegan. "What I'm sure of is, once he gets in, he won't come out. "He might have to wait but when he gets his chance, he won't come out in a hurry."

The 23-year-old looks a strong candidate



Bridges relief

Stoke 0 Sunderland 1

MICHAEL BRIDGES admitted he was overcome with relief after banishing years of injury misery with his first goal since May 2000.

Bridges, 26, needed only eight minutes after climbing off the bench before heading the winner against sliding Stoke.

Endured

The goal ended an incredible four-and-a-half-year wait for a senior strike for Bridges, who has endured countless injury problems and three transfers.

The forward is desperately attempting to rebuild his career back on Wearside after failed moves to Newcastle and Bolton.

His match-winner took

KEV FEARS MILL WOE

KEVIN BLACKWELL has told Leeds not to become the first victims of woeless Rotherham's woeful season.

The Yorkshire rivals meet at Millmoor tonight with Ronnie Moore's side still searching for their first victory.

The Millers are bottom of the Championship and doomed for relegation after their worst ever run.

But Blackwell said: "Rotherham will start winning games soon."

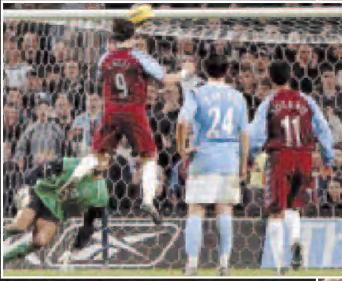
"I just hope we don't become the first team to be beaten by them this season."

Winger Jamal Campbell-Ryce will make his Millers debut after joining from Charlton for a nominal fee.

lesson to Colombia's fallen Angel

WRIGHT WAY TO DO IT

...but this is the wrong way



HOWLER: Angel heads over after David James had saved his penalty

to oust under-performing skipper David Beckham on the right of midfield – even though his left-foot strike from 25 yards “would have killed somebody in the crowd if it hadn’t hit the net”, according to Keegan.

The City boss added: “Shaun doesn’t have to be on the right wing.

“He’s good enough to be in centre-midfield or behind the striker in a diamond formation. He is so versatile.”

Villa boss David O’Leary was left to ponder the more dubious strain of versatility which afflicts Lee Hendrie, whose capacity for getting into trouble matches his undoubted football talent.

Hendrie was sent off for a head-butt



gesture at Danny Mills – in his first appearance following a suspension for getting five bookings.

O’Leary has asked referee to reconsider because Hendrie made no contact with Mills, but he revealed: “Lee shouldn’t keep getting involved in things like that. He shouldn’t give referees the opportunity to think about sending him off.

“But Lee is Lee. He gets booked for such stupid reasons. I’ve told him not to get involved. I am speaking to him about it.”

TEAMS

MAN CITY: James, Mills, Dastin (Onuoha 72), Dunn, Jordan, Shaun Wright-Phillips, Barton, Bovell, Silbrey, Fowler, Macken. Subs: Sommell, Waterreus, Bradley Wright-Phillips, Pineda, ASKA: James, Hendrie, Do Is Cruz, Delaney, Mellberg, Samuel, Solano, Hendrie, McCann, Barry (Hitzlsperger 51), Angel, Cole (Luke Moore 61). Subs: Postma, Ridgewell, Davis. REF: M Riley.

IVAR INGIMARSSON helped Reading knock Wigan off top-spot in the Championship and then boasted: “We don’t fear anyone.”

The Latics have not won in five games but held on for a point after Lloyd Owusu cancelled out Alan Mahon’s opener.

Ingimarsson, who superbly shackled 20-goal hitmen Jason Roberts and Nathan Ellington, insisted the Royals are capable of realising their Premiership dream.

The Icelandic interna-

ional said: “We can go all the way but it’s early days. We have no one to fear when on top of our game.”

“No one has taken us to the cleaners. We are one of the better teams.”

“We knew about their pace so we made sure we didn’t allow them too much space behind us and tried to get them offside.”

“We practised that and it worked.”

■ Reading 1 Wigan 1

“They have become marked men and Wigan

rely on them a lot but they appeared nothing special at all.”

Wigan went ahead on 26 minutes when Alan Mahon’s free-kick was deflected in off James Harper.

Fight

But that only inspired Reading to put up a fight and three minutes before the break Owusu powered them level.

Glenn Little tore down the right and delivered a pin-point centre straight onto the head of Owusu

who made no mistake with a stunning header.

Coppell’s men finally

started to pour forward

after the break and Dean

Morgan twice went close

before Nicky Shorey smashed a free-kick against the bar in stoppage time.

Wigan boss Jewell said:

“I don’t agree with people saying there is less pressure now we’re not first.”

“I’d rather be top of the table and have 43 points than 41.”

“Pressure is part of this game – if you can’t handle it you shouldn’t be in it.”

Distributed by **NewspaperDirect**

Coca-Cola LEAGUE

CHESTER 1
OXFORD UTD 3

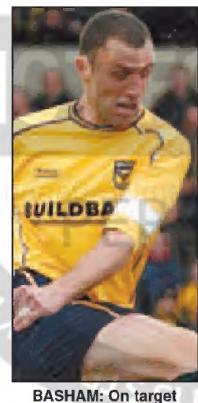
OXFORD caretaker boss Darren Patterson was delighted as his struggling side pulled off a surprise victory against Ian Rush’s team.

Goals from Matt Robinson and Steve Basham gave the visitors the points.

Chester’s Kevin Ellison had equalised Mark E’Bey’s early strike for the visitors.

Patterson said: “I’m hoping we can use this as a building block to go on to bigger and better things.”

“I’m really pleased for the lads for all the hard work they’ve put in.”



BASHAM: On target

LINCOLN 3
YEOVIL 1

LINCOLN manager Keith Alexander slammed the performance of referee Mark Cowburn after he sent off a player from each team.

Two goals from Marcus Richardson and one from Gary Taylor-Fletcher gave Lincoln the points despite Terry Skiverton’s consolation effort, but not before Yeovil’s Gavin Williams and Lincoln’s Ben Futcher were sent off.

“We have played some good stuff. The only person that was going to spoil it was the referee,” said Alexander.

KIDDERMINSTER 0
NORTHAMPTON 2

KIDDERMINSTER caretaker boss Shaun Cunningham was left reflecting on his fifth defeat in five games since taking over.

Goals from Scott McGlynn and Julian Alsop broke the resistance of rock-bottom Harriers and left Cunningham wondering whether he was still in contention for the job.

“I was interviewed for the job and I think it went well,” he said. “I imagine the board of directors will want to make a decision quite quickly.”

A stunning Andy Scott strike sealed the points for Orient, leaving home supporters to vent their anger at Haslam.

MANSFIELD 0
LEYTON 0 1

CARLTON PALMER urged Mansfield fans to give the players their backing after the crowd called for chairman Keith Haslam’s head.

The Stags have now gone nine games without a win, but caretaker manager Palmer said: “We need the fans to get behind the team. It is not a good situation off the field here. It is not helping and needs sorting quickly.”

“He took his chance superbly when it came along. It was a brilliant effort and I hope there are plenty more like that in his locker,” said Richardson.

NOTTS CO 2
CAMBRIDGE 1

NOTTS COUNTY caretaker player-boss Ian Richardson was full of admiration for Chris Palmer, whose spectacular late strike secured victory.

Matt Williams had put County ahead before Shane Tudor levelled. Paul Bolland saw red for the Magpies before Palmer’s stunning winner.

“He took his chance superbly when it came along. It was a brilliant effort and I hope there are plenty more like that in his locker,” said Richardson.

ROCHDALE 2
BOSTON 0

ROCHDALE manager Steve Parkin praised his side’s tremendous team effort as they sank Boston with two second-half goals.

Leo Bertos and Ernie Cooksey fired home fierce drives as Dale made it four league wins on the trot.

“We’ve had some good performances over recent weeks, but the most important thing for me is the team effort,” said Parkin.

But Boston manager Steve Evans claimed: “I’m sure, come the end of the season, we will finish above Rochdale.”

RUSHDEN 0
MACCLESFIELD 2

ERNIE TIPPETT was disappointed as his Rushden side went down to two strikes in either half.

Graham Potter struck just before the interval, and Jon Parkin added a second late on.

Tippet, who is hoping to improve his side’s aggressiveness, said: “We played well and controlled the game but there was not a cutting edge.”

Maccs boss Brian Horton said: “I’m very pleased. The win has pushed us into the leading pack.”



HORTON: Delighted

SWANSEA 1
BURY 3

BURY manager Graham Barrow declared Swansea’s early goal a “blessing in disguise” as his team battled back to a deserved victory.

Kevin Nugent scored after just 90 seconds, but the visitors hit back through name-sake David Nugent, before goals from Dwayne Mattis and Brian Barry-Murphy clinched the win.

“It was a blessing in disguise that Swansea scored so early because it gave us time to regroup and recover,” said Barrow.

WYCOMBE 1
BRISTOL ROVERS 0

WYCOMBE caretaker player-manager Keith Ryan was happy after seeing his side win their second game on the trot.

A second-half penalty from Nathan Tyson was enough to see Wanderers secure the victory and move them into the top half of the table.

“I’m really pleased,” said Ryan.

“I’ve been asked to do the manager’s job short-term, and it’s got to be easier doing it short-term than long-term, but I’ve just got my teeth into it.”

SCUNTHORPE 3
SHREWSBURY 1

SCUNTHORPE’S Brian Laws hailed the patience of his Scunthorpe side after they moved five points clear at the top with a comprehensive victory.

Veteran Peter Beagrie opened the scoring for the Iron from the penalty spot after David Walton was sent off.

Jamie Colley equalised, but goals from Paul Hayes and Cleveland Taylor put the game beyond doubt.

Laws said: “We had to be patient and did not panic.”

“We did so much probing and had the majority of the possession.”

Ivar heading for top

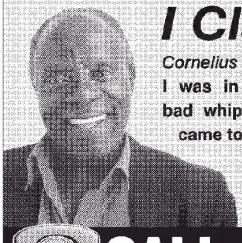
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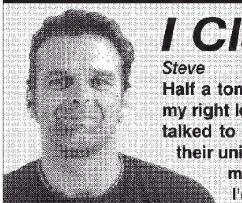
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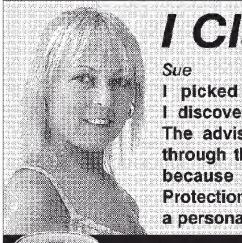
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**SERIOUSLY
football**

Handy Andy lays it on line

WE'LL DIG WIG OUT OF A HOLE

SAINTS goal hero Andreas Jakobsson has told his team-mates only they can save Steve Wigley from the sack.

Jakobsson scored his first Premiership goal to spare Saints from another defeat against fellow strugglers Palace.

But head coach Wigley is still teetering on the brink after he was booted off by supporters.

Jakobsson said: "We are all behind the manager.

The bad results are not down to him, they are down to the players, and we are the only people who can put things right.

"Steve is a great trainer and he is respected by us all but we are just not getting the results he deserves.

"Maybe we need to work a little harder in training to change the things that are going wrong.

"We have played badly but we have not been losing three or four-nil.

Cross

"We need to get a couple of good results and I'm sure things will turn around – but that needs to happen quickly for Steve's sake."

Saints seemed to be heading for their eighth defeat of the season after goals from Andy Johnson and Wayne Routledge had put Palace 2-1 up.

Johnson scored his ninth goal of the season, heading in Aki Riihilahti's cross in the 48th minute.

And though Kevin Phillips drew Saints level two minutes later, Routledge restored Palace's lead in the 54th minute.

But centre-back Jakobsson earned the home side a point when he turned in substitute Peter Crouch's knock-down 14 minutes from time.

Former Sweden captain



TOP DRAWER: Jakobsson (on ground) is mobbed after his goal

by GEORGE SCOTT

Southampton ... 2

C Palace 2

Jakobsson, who played because of a virus to Claus Lundekvam, admitted: "I could not really miss. It is nice to score my first goal in England."

Wigley's prospects were not helped when Micky Adams – one of those tipped to replace him and

a guest at the game – was given a standing ovation when interviewed on the pitch at half-time.

Former England boss Glenn Hoddle, chairman Rupert Lowe's choice to take over, was also among the crowd, along with ex-Saints boss Gordon Strachan.

Spirit

Meanwhile, Palace defender Fitz Hall said Saints needed to show the Eagles' fighting spirit to beat the drop.

The defender spent a

brief spell at St Mary's before being sold to Palace and said: "We have got great spirit and that is what is helping us."

TEAMS

SOUTHAMPTON: Keller, Dodd (Griffith 68), Jakobsson, Kenton, Le Saux, Telfer, Anders Svensson, Delap, Fernandes, Blackstock (Crouch 68), Phillips. Subs: Ormerod, Hignbotham, Poke, Crystle. **NOTES:** Steve, Boyce, Routledge, Hall, Grigg, Watson, Kilkka, Hughes, Johnson, Subs: Speroni, Freedman, Andrews, Leigertwood, Lakin.

REF: P Walton.

King fires killer Shot

BARNET lead the Conference by seven points after their 3-2 win at Aldershot.

Defender Simon King hit the winner seven minutes from time after Shots had twice equalised.

And there was more good news for Barnet as second-placed Carlisle went down to a surprise 2-1 defeat at struggling York.

Carlisle's Peter Murphy was sent off for a two-footed lunge.

STRUGGLING Crewe may have committed daylight robbery at Highfield Road – but referee Paul Taylor says it was all within the law.

Dean Ashton netted from the spot after 25 minutes when Adie Williams blocked David Vaughan's run deep into the Sky Blues' penalty box.

It looked a harsh call when Taylor pointed straight to the spot.

But the Hertfordshire official was quick to defend his decision, pointing out that penalty-box rules have changed in recent years.

Taylor said: "I gave the penalty for obstruction. The old law where obstruction is an indirect free kick no longer exists.

"For the past two seasons obstruction has been considered a penalty offence." But

SPOT ON, DEAN

■ Coventry 0 Crewe 1

that was little comfort to Williams, who said: "I have given away penalties in my time and I am old enough and experienced enough to hold my hand up when it happens – but that was not a penalty."

Denied

"I know David from the Wales set-up. I knew he would feint to shoot with his left foot but there was no contact at all."

The home side poured forward in the second half but Dele Adebola, Gary McSheffrey and Patrick Suttor were all denied by keeper Clayton Ince. Scorer Ashton said: "We won't want to defend like that every week but we are delighted with the win."



Fulham crisis deepens for Cookie

COLE, HARD
WINTER
AHEADHARD TO
TAKE: Coleman
feels the strain

FULHAM boss Chris Coleman faces the biggest test of his managerial career to revive his team's fortunes

But he believes he needs to look no further than his old club Blackburn for inspiration.

Coleman's former Wales team-mate Mark Hughes has breathed new life into resurgent Rovers, who are unbeaten in five games and pulled clear of the Premiership relegation zone with their first away win of the season.

Appetite

But Fulham have lost six of their last eight matches and the honeymoon is definitely over for "Cookie", who came under fire from the club's fans after a desperate display.

Another potential "no-lose" game looms at Norwich on Saturday and Coleman will demand some of the battling qualities and appetite Rovers showed in abundance.

Coleman said: "When you look at our stats, we've not come from being behind this season and then you look at Blackburn and the way they fought

by MARTIN BLACKBURN

Fulham...0 Blackburn...2

back against Birmingham last week. That says a lot.

They showed character and when you're in a relegation scrap, it's not always ability that gets you out of it. You have to show character and we were lacking that.

"We've got talented players but what we haven't got at the moment is fighters. We've got one or two but that's nowhere near enough."

The Premiership's youngest manager made an encouraging start to his career but knows it will count for nothing unless he can turn things round quickly. A Carling Cup quarter-final clash with Chelsea tomorrow now takes on almost minor significance for Coleman compared to the trip to Carrow Road.

Test

He added: "This is by far and away the hardest test of my managerial career."

Coleman's men would do well to follow the lead of Blackburn's man-of-the-match Paul Dickov, who earned and converted a second-half penalty following Paul Gallagher's early opener.

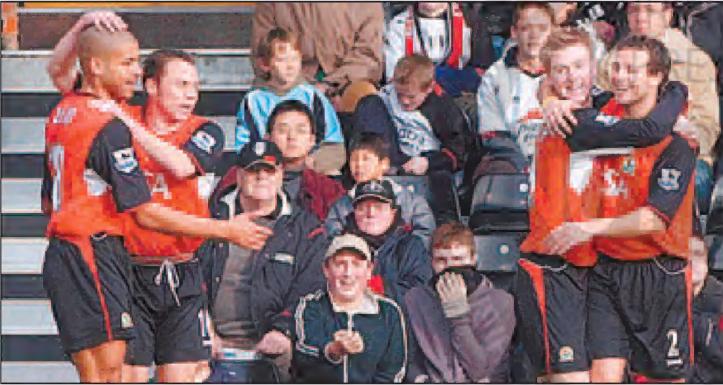
"The Scot may not be everybody's liking but he gave Fulham centre-back Zat Knight a torrid afternoon - making him look like a 'frightened lamb' according to Coleman."

Rovers midfielder Steven Reid said: "Dickie is a pest. We knew if we got it to his feet he would create real problems - he's been our star man in every game for the last month or so."

TEAMS

FULHAM: Crossley (Van der Sar 73), Volz, Knight, Rehman, Bocanegra, Malbranque, Legwinski (McBride 66), Peembridge, Diop, Radzinski, Cole. Subs: Hammond, Pearce, Rosenior.

BLACKBURN: Friedel, Neill, Short, Todd, Johansson (Mata 90), Reid, Ferguson, Tugay, Emerton, Dickov, Gallagher (Thompson 83). Subs: Flitcroft, Pedersen, Enckelman. REF: R Styles.



FIRST CLASS: Blackburn celebrate after Paul Gallagher (second right) put Rovers ahead

Dean Sturr-ed by 'Arry

WOLVES striker Dean Sturridge is in no doubt who he wants to take over as the club's new manager.

Chief executive Jez Moxey dismissed claims his board had already appointed Sir Bobby Robson as "wildly inaccurate".

But the former England boss is certainly their second choice should Harry Redknapp decide his Bournemouth base is more preferable than the Black Country.

And Sturridge, who played under Redknapp's former Portsmouth assistant Jim Smith at Derby, is convinced the pair would galvanise the Molineux club. He said:

Sheff Utd 3 Wolves 3

"We all know Harry Redknapp's reputation and qualities. His CV is exceptional. To do what he has done at Portsmouth over the past two-and-a-half years is fantastic.

"He and Jim Smith have had great times in football and they know what the game is all about and what they want from their players.

"Their teams play with a lot of pace and passion, show a lot of character and put the opposition on the back foot. Those are exactly the qualities you need to get

out of this division. I had great times with Jim Smith at Derby. He ignited my career there.

"Harry said Wolves is a sleeping giant that has been awoken once with promotion two seasons ago. But if someone can take the club by the scruff of the neck, there are no limits to what can be achieved."

Sheffield United looked to have propelled themselves towards the play-off zone with goals from Leigh Bromby, Paul Thirwell and Paul Shaw before Joleon Lescott's late equaliser rescued Wolves after goals from Seyi George Olofinjana and Carl Cort.



ON TARGET: Scorer Cort

THIS WEEK'S
B-I-G GAMES

(Non-League games subject to change)

TONIGHT (7.45 unless stated) Coca-Cola Championship Rotherham v Leeds.....	11 Leeds v Leicester.....
Nationwide Conference Cup— 2nd Rnd North: Droylsden v Worcester..... 2nd Rnd South: Thurrock v Margate.....	12 Millwall v Sheff Utd.....
Unibond—Prem: Leek Tn v Burscough.....	13 Notts Forest v QPR.....
TOMORROW (7.45 unless stated) Carling Cup 4th Round Fulham v Chelsea..... Watford v Portsmouth..... Coca-Cola Championship Crewe v Millwall.....	14 Plymouth v Burnley.....
LDV Vans Trophy Southern Quarter-Final Bristol Rovers v Wycombe..... Leyton Orient v Walsall..... Northampton v Southend..... Swindon v Bristol City.....	15 Sunderland v West Ham.....
Northern Quarter-Final Chester v Wrexham..... Hereford v Blackpool..... Macclesfield v Tranmere..... Oldham v Hartlepool.....	16 Watford v Stoke.....
Bell's Scottish League Division Two Berwick v Forfar..... Dumbarton v Alloa.....	17 Wolves v Reading.....
Division Three Cowdenbeath v Montrose..... Peterhead v Stenhousemuir.....	FA Cup Second Round 18 Blackpool v Port Vale.....
Nationwide Conference Cup—2nd Rnd North: Barrow v Runcorn, Kettering v Nuneaton, Worksop v Gainsborough..... 2nd Rnd South: Dorchester v Newmarket Co, Macclesfield v Sutton Utd.....	19 Camb City v MK Dons.....
Ryman—Prem: Dover v Leyton, Hendon v Windsor, Wealdstone v Chelmsford..... Southern—Prem: Hitchin v Histon.....	OFF
Unibond—Prem: Marine v Hyde, Prescot v Bacıdova, Spennymoor v Bishop Auckland, Witton v Workington.....	20 Exeter v Doncaster.....
WEDNESDAY (7.45 unless stated) UEFA Cup Group A Ferencvaros v Basel..... Feyenoord v Schalke 04.....	21 Bournemouth v Carlisle.....
Group B Athletic Bilbao v Steaua Bucharest..... Besiktas v Standard Liege.....	22 Halifax v Chester.....
Group C Austria Vienna v Bruges..... Real Zaragoza v Unipo.....	23 Hartlepool v Aldershot.....
Group D Panionios v Dinamo Tbilisi..... Sporting v Sochaux.....	24 Herford v Boston Utd.....
Carling Cup 4th Round Man Utd v Arsenal..... Tottenham v Liverpool.....	25 Histon v Yeovil (1.30).....
Unibond—Prem: Gateshead v Whitley.....	26 Hull v Macclesfield.....
THURSDAY (7.45 unless stated) UEFA Cup Group E Aigaleo v Lazio..... Partizan Belgrade v Villarreal.....	27 Northampton v Bury (1pm).....
Group F AZ Alkmaar v Rangers..... Auxerre v Amrica Wronki.....	28 Oldham v Leyton Orient.....
Group G Beveren v Benfica..... Dinamo Zagreb v Heerenveen.....	29 Peterborough v Bath.....
Group H Allemagne Aachen v Zenit St Petersburg..... Seville v AEK Athens.....	30 Rushden & Diamonds v Colchester.....
FRIDAY (7.30 unless stated) FA Cup Second Round Camb City v MK Dons (7.45).....	31 Celtic v Hibernian.....
Saturday (3pm unless stated) Barclays Premiership 1 Arsenal v Birmingham..... 2 Aston Villa v Liverpool.....	32 Dundee Utd v Motherwell.....
— Blackburn v Tottenham (5.15)..... — Chelsea v Newcastle (12.45)..... 3 Everton v Bolton..... 4 Man Utd v Southampton..... 5 Norwich v Fulham..... 6 Portsmouth v West Brom	33 Hearts v Dunfermline.....
Coca-Cola Championship 7 Brighton v Rotherham..... 8 Cardiff v Gillingham..... 9 Crewe v Ipswich..... 10 Derby v Coventry.....	34 Livingston v Dundee.....
SUNDAY FA Cup Second Round Hinckley Utd v Bradford (2pm).....	35 Bell's Scottish League Division One
Barclays Premiership Crystal Palace v Charlton (4.05).....	36 Clyde v Falkirk.....
Coca-Cola Championship Wigan v Preston (12.30).....	37 Partick v St Johnstone.....
Bank of Scotland Scottish Premier League Inverness CT v Rangers (2pm).....	38 Queen of South v Raith Rovers.....

Rebrov is Dew to shine

■ West Ham 3 Watford 2

WEST HAM boss Alan Pardew is confident Sergei Rebrov can rediscover the form that made him one of the Champions League's most feared strikers.

Rebrov scored his first league goal in English football for three seasons to ease pressure on Pardew following two defeats.

It was Rebrov's most impressive display since joining on a free transfer in the summer from Spurs, where he was frozen out after being bought for £11m four years ago.

But the Ukraine international arrived in England with a glowing reputation after his goals helped Dynamo Kiev to the Champions League semi-finals in 1999 and remains one of the competition's leading goalscorers.

Sharp

Now Pardew hopes Rebrov's 58th-minute winner – after West Ham had stormed back from 2-0 down through goals from Nigel Reo-Coker and Darren Powell – will finally kick-start his English career.

He said: "Sergei has looked sharp on the training pitch all season and it finally happened in a match perhaps because he has broken through a psychological barrier just when we needed it most."

Watford boss Ray Lewington is demanding his side respond tomorrow in the Carling Cup quarter-final against Portsmouth after surrendering a two-goal lead courtesy of strikes from Brynjar Gunnarsson and Bruce Dyer.

He said: "We can't dwell on this defeat."

Dublin's delight

■ Leicester 2 Plymouth 1

DION DUBLIN insists he is happy to play anywhere if it means he is assured first-team football at Leicester.

Dublin was given the opportunity to show new boss Craig Levein he can do a job for the Foxes in his first start under the Scot.

The ex-England international was only playing after an injury to Martin Keown but produced an outstanding performance – and the winning goal.

Secured

Dublin said: "It's nice to play and if the manager wants me to play up front or at the back I'll do that."

Dublin ensured Leicester got their first win at the Walkers Stadium on a Saturday this season.

But the home course looked set to continue after Tony Capaldi fired Argyle into a ninth-minute lead.

However, within six minutes of the second half Leicester were ahead. James Scowcroft dived in with an equaliser before Dublin powered home Chris Makin's cross.

SERIOUSLY
football

Chelsea ace's shock confession

COURT RAP SORTED ME OUT

Says JOHN TERRY

JOHN TERRY has admitted being hauled into court helped turn him into the superstar he is now.

Youth team product Terry has become the heart and soul of a Chelsea side which is starting to look invincible.

But the honest 23-year-old revealed it was the experience of being charged with affray – following an incident involving a bouncer at a club in London's Knightsbridge – which made him focus fully on his football career.

Terry was cleared in August 2002 but the fact he ended up in court ensured he missed out on captaining the England Under-21 side at the European Championships in Switzerland.

It was thought he might even make a late claim for inclusion in Sven Goran Eriksson's World Cup squad – but his time away from the international set-up forced the Barking-born defender to decide where his priorities lay.

Sweet

Now it's truly a case of Terry's All Gold, for life is as sweet as it gets.

Off the field he's got a beautiful girlfriend, a top-of-the-range Bentley with the number-plate JT26 and a new contract worth £90,000-a-week.

On the field, he's a regular for Eriksson's England and is skipping a scintillating Chelsea side who are top of the Premiership and looking menacing in Europe.

He's also scoring a few goals to boot – his double at Charlton made it five for the season.

Confirming boss Jose Mourinho's assessment that things are going great for him and off the field, Terry commented: "I never had a problem going out too much or anything like that but I'm very happy at home."

"I've got a wonderful girlfriend who looks after me and things are really going well at the minute. I've just signed a new five-year contract

by DAVID WOODS

Charlton 0
Chelsea 4

at Chelsea and I'm in the perfect position. The turning point was the court case. Because of that the FA told me I wasn't allowed to play for the Under-21s.

"I was captain of the side and we got to the finals of a big tournament and missing out on that hit home. It made me look at my life."

"I was only young at the time when I went through it. And it should never have happened because it was rubbish in the first place. People who know me know that anyway and it's all in the past now."

He may drive the big car and pick up the huge wages but Terry – whose double at The Valley, along with strikes from Damien Duff and Eidur Gudjohnsen ensured Mourinho's men stayed top – hasn't forgotten where he came from.

"When I was young Dennis Wise and Marcel Desailly helped me a lot and I always try to be there for the young lads at Chelsea if they need me," he added.

"I do all different things, including helping pay for their driving lessons because I know what it's like to be on their wages. I feel if they need to come to me they can talk to me."

Charlton boss Alan Curbishley, who is getting some serious stick from the fans, did plenty of talking himself as he conducted dressing-room inquest.

He admitted: "This club is realistic but over the years we have managed to punch above our weight which is why we beat Chelsea 4-2 last year, managed to take points off Arsenal and beat Liverpool twice.

"At the moment we don't look as if we can do that against the top sides. We've had a mentality at this club that we've got to get back to. A result like this might make the penny drop."

TEAMS

CHARLTON: Kinsley, Young, El Karkouri, Fortune, Konchesky, Klichishev (Rommedahl 64), Murphy (Euell 64), Holland, Thomas (Heidarsson 63), Johansson, Bertlett. Subs: Jeffers, Andersen.

CHELSEA: Cech, Paulo Ferreira, Terry, Ricardo Carvalho, Calles, Tiago, Lampard, Makelele, Duff (Gersm 71), Robben (Babayaro 79), Gudjohnsen (Drogba 61). Subs: Smerin, Cudicini. Ref: M Clattenburg.



IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO:
Terry celebrates his double joy



SUPER STRIKE: Terry fires in his second against Charlton

He Ain't sorry for leaving

■ by STEVE GOODMAN
QPR 1 Cardiff 0

GARETH AINSWORTH was dumped by Cardiff after helping them win promotion.

And, after taking revenge with QPR in this clash, the winger hopes he can achieve similar success with the west London side.

Rangers made it payback time for their 1-0 loss to the Bluebirds in the 2003 Division Two play-off final, thanks to a first-half strike from central defender Danny Shittu.

Ainsworth was part of Cardiff's squad for their Millennium Stadium triumph, having joined from Wimbledon two months before, but was then told he was surplus to requirements.

Revenge

The 31-year-old recalled: "I got promoted with Cardiff last year but was told after the final that I wasn't going to be wanted.

"In fact, within 10 minutes on the coach home QPR rang me. I told them my situation... it's funny how things turn out."

Shittu took his own form of revenge with a thunderous 23rd-minute finish after collecting two facial injuries from City's Alan Lee.

"I don't think a brick wall would have stopped the ball going in," said Ainsworth. "I've never seen Danny lose it and I don't think I'd want to."

"But he was close to it today and when our fans started singing, 'Shittu's gonna get you' to Lee, he certainly wouldn't have fancied it."

After a fourth straight defeat, Cardiff manager Lennie Lawrence said: "We've gone from as good as it gets to as toothless as it gets inside three weeks."

I Kin not bear this

■ Gillingham 2 Nott F 1

JOE KINNEAR is ready for crisis talks as the strain of Forest's fight against relegation takes its toll.

Forest boss Kinnear says he will meet chairman Nigel Doughty over the next few days to discuss his future.

His side were a shambles as they crashed to defeat against fellow-strugglers Gillingham, leaving them second-bottom of the table.

Kinnear, who previously had to quit Wimbledon after suffering a heart attack, said: "People don't know what stress and strain I have to work under. Some days I wonder if it's worth it."

Gills' chairman Paul Scally revealed Steve McMahon and Micky Adams are on his shortlist to replace former boss Andy Hessonthal.

Forest took the lead through Gareth Taylor but Gillingham were given a lifeline when Wes Morgan handled in the box.

Darius Henderson converted the spot-kick and Tommy Johnson grabbed an 82nd-minute winner.

SERIOUSLY
football

Beware wounded beast warns Robson

RUUD'S IN MOOD TO RIP 'EM APART

IT WON'T bother Ruud van Nistelrooy one bit that his kid sister could have nodded in the goal which sent alarm bells ringing at the top of the Premiership scoring charts.

His 72nd minute strike was the Dutch ace's 12th of the season but, astonishingly, it was his first league goal in open play this campaign.

Van the Man has plundered eight in Europe to add to three penalty goals on the domestic front.

But his close range header won't have gone unnoticed by the likes of Thierry Henry and Alan Shearer.

Injuries and suspension have disrupted the scoring exploits of the man who has helped himself to at least 20 league goals in each of his three seasons at Old Trafford.

And ex-United star Bryan Robson believes Sir Alex Ferguson now has a dangerous beast on his hands as he tries to do the unthinkable of derailing of Chelsea's break-

neck run for the title.

Paul Scholes grabbed another couple of goals either side of van Nistelrooy's effort to underline his return but Robson believes one or two might do well to sit up and take notice after the second half dismantling of his side.

"Ruud is like an injured animal—that's how goalscorers are," said Robson.

"Goals are what he thrives on and he's like a wounded beast."

Poor

"He will want to finish top scorer, make no mistake. Players like him and Henry and Shearer are relentless in that."

"His goals in Europe are great for him but he'll want a bagful in the league—and you would not bet against him doing that."

"United are showing signs of going on a run and when they are playing well, it's just great for him."

Robson accepts the chances of United putting their poor start behind them and mak-

ing up lost ground is a massive task, but added: "It'd be unbelievable but they have done it before."

"It is a lot to ask but United are suddenly looking like a side capable of putting a big run together and scoring lots of goals."

Certainly, van Nistelrooy feels his hard work is paying off.

"I hope this one gets me going now because I've been back eight or nine games," he said.

"I just want to score goals and as for the title, well, we're not ruling anything out."

Albion had done well in a tightly-contested opening 45 minutes and they deserved to go in level at the interval.

Danger

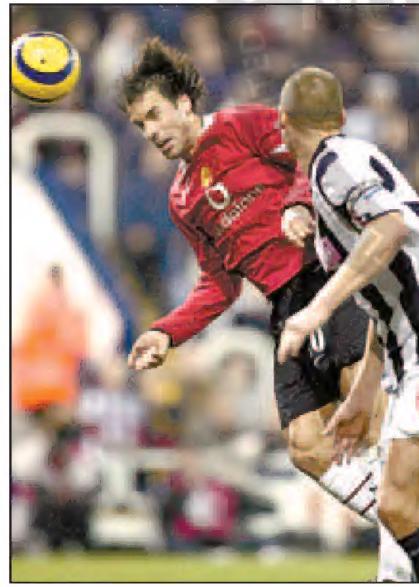
But after the break Robson's plans were ruthlessly unpicked by Scholes and Ryan Giggs.

Scholes changed the game when he was put in by a stunning flick from Giggs for the first goal after 53 minutes.

Robson revealed: "I had spelled out the danger of Scholes' little one-twos."

TEAMS

WEST BROM: Hout, Scimeca, Moore (Gaardeoo 24), Pure, Clement, Greening, Sakri (Horsfield 75), Johnson, Gera, Contra (Robinson 38), Earnshaw. Subs: Kuszczak, Hulse. MAN UTD: Carroll, Brown, Ferdinand, Silvestre, Heinz, Fletcher (Ronaldo 72), Keane, Scholes, Giggs, van Nistelrooy (Smith 75), Rooney. Subs: Howard, O'Shea, Fortune. REF: S Bennett.



EYE FOR GOAL: Van Nistelrooy heads home



BRACE ACE: Scholes gets his second goal

wooly's world

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Pom-elled AUSSIE WILL-TO-WIN SHINES THROUGH

YOU'VE either got it or you haven't. You can cope or you can't. You're either good or great. It's what makes sporting champions.

A year ago, English rugby was on top of the world. At Twickenham on Saturday, Australia once more taught us a lesson.

There are so many qualities that turn teams into special ones and in the closing minutes of a wonderful sporting occasion, this new England side proved they don't have what it takes. Not yet.

After battling back and taking the lead with minutes to spare, they lost their concentration and composure and failed to live with the pressure which comes when facing the best.

After losing a 15-point lead, Australia dug deep to go again. England, having worked themselves into a winning position, buckled.

Desire

"It's only about winning," said England coach Andy Robinson. "That's all I'm interested in. At this level you have to understand what pressure is all about and live with it."

"I'm disappointed with our lack of discipline, especially as we had talked all week about how this match would be won in the closing moments, just as it was in Sydney a year ago."

"To give away two penalties after taking the lead is hard to take. What the players must do is learn from it and come again."

So it was Australia's day, at Twickenham and, later, at Elland Road, where their rugby league side humiliated Great Britain in the Tri-Nations final with a master class.

The mental strength, toughness and desire to succeed that all Aussie teams possess was evident again, particularly at Twickenham when they found themselves 19-15 down after being 15-0 ahead at half-time.

So what did captain George Gregan

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Twickenham revenge with two penalties.

It was a reality check for new coach Robinson and he knows there is a long road ahead. Greatness is measured by doing it over and over again.

New England players, new coach and ideas but falling short when it matters most. This was the first real test of character for a new era of English rugby and as the players trooped off the message was clear:

Australia are the best in the world and England need to re-discover that ruthless streak that made them World Champions.

You've either got it or you haven't and England this morning are looking for it again.

BRAVEST sporting decision of the weekend was England rugby coach Andy Robinson taking off Henry Paul after just 24 minutes.

It worked until Charlie Hodgson was injured and left England without cover at fly-half. The kicking also had to be taken over by Mike Tindall, who is our fourth choice.

"I don't accept it was a gamble," said Robinson. "I'm paid to make decisions and that was my call. I spoke to my coaches and I would do the same again."

Henry Paul was taken off because he was making too many mistakes and I had a world-class player in Will Greenwood on the bench. I am not going to shy away from big decisions.

"I have looked at a film of the game and would make the same decision. Would you be asking me the same question had we won?"



MISSING IN ACTION:
Fly-half Charlie Hodgson limps off after a horror show with the boot

COME BACK, JONNY

HERO last week against South Africa, villain against the Aussies on Saturday, although well done to Charlie Hodgson for facing up to his nightmare at Twickenham.

When England needed him most he couldn't deliver and found the pressure of kicking vital penalties too much for him. Yet he didn't hide away, instead coming out to explain why it went so horribly wrong.

"The Twickenham pressure got to me," he admitted.

"The exposure, the expectancy, all the faces willing the ball to go over

and then I could hear the groans when it didn't."

"It was high pressure and I'm not making excuses. I should not have missed two comfortable kicks."

Amends

"The first one was bad enough and when the second came, I wanted to make amends. Now I have got to deal with it and move on."

He may not get another chance.

When England play again in the Six Nations, Jonny Wilkinson will be back from injury. Had Wilkinson

been fit on Saturday then England probably would have won.

Poor Hodgson had been targeted by Australia, as coach Eddie Jones explained: "We decided to go at Hodgson and play through him. He lacked experience at this level."

Hodgson also suffered a dead leg and came off in the second half at the height of England's comeback.

It completed a disappointing match for him and a week after rugby asked, "Can England live without Wilkinson?", the answer came as most definitely, no.



BARWICK: FA chief

A NEW LIFE OF BRIAN

BRIAN BARWICK is a smashing bloke, enjoys a social drink, is great company and, in his role with BBC's Match of the Day and now as ITV's controller of sport, has a book full of business and football contacts and friends.

His life is about to change. As the FA's new chief executive Barwick must prove himself the new face of football.

For many years he has been a behind-the-scenes operator. Now he has to step into the limelight and lead this disastrous organisation into a new era.

Barwick must be tough, decisive, his own man, not react to criticism and stamp his authority from day one. The FA, who have lurched from crisis to crisis this season, and don't have a man around the boardroom who could make a decision, are crying out for leadership.

They have chosen Barwick and he must prove himself a big man in every sense.

COLE FIRE NOT CURE

IN this season of panicking Premiership chairmen, I do hope Fulham's Mohamed Al Fayed is not going to join the game of musical chairs for managers.

Chris Coleman is under pressure and admitted after Saturday's 2-0 home defeat by Blackburn he will be looking for a new job if the losing run continues.

He also said for the first time that he felt his players didn't want it badly enough, that there wasn't the desire in the team.

I know the buck stops with the manager but couldn't some of our over paid, over-hyped players take responsibility for once?

CONGRATULATIONS TO Bolton in taking quick action against the spitting El-Hadj Djouf – but they didn't go far enough. They should have sent him back to Liverpool and then Liverpool should have kicked him back to France. Good riddance, hopefully.

SERIOUSLY
football

FA could throw African out after latest disgrace

DIOUF FACES A SPIT ROASTING

by NEIL JOHNSTON

Bolton.....0 Portsmouth.....1

EL-HADJI DIOUF faces being kicked out of the Premiership unless he brings his vile spitting habit under control.

The FA will today launch their own probe into the Senegal striker's disgusting act during Bolton's defeat to Portsmouth on Saturday, when the 23-year-old was caught on television spitting in the face of Pompey skipper Arjan de Zeeuw.

Diouf, who is on a season-long loan from Liverpool, last night issued a grovelling apology after being fined £50,000 - two weeks wages - by the north-west club.

But the former Lens player now faces a minimum three-match ban and another £50,000 fine by the FA.

Soho Square chiefs are alarmed that this is the FOURTH time Diouf has been at the centre of spitting rows since arriving in England from Lens for £10m in June 2002.

And FA insiders, worried about the Premiership's image being tarnished by such revolting behaviour, have hinted they could throw the book at Diouf and stop him from playing unless he is able to control himself.

Livid

Diouf escaped a red card after referee Steve Dunn missed the second-half incident, which left de Zeeuw who had earlier scored what proved to be the match-winner, livid.

An FA source said: "We will look at the match video before deciding what action is required."

"We're aware Bolton launched their own investigation and have taken swift action but now we need to look at it."

The Premiership is watched by millions of viewers around the world and it is important players realise they are role models to thousands of people.

"It doesn't look good when one player is seen spitting in the face of another. This is unacceptable behaviour."

Since being lured to the



DISGUSTING!
El-Hadji Diouf
shames himself
again by spitting at
Arjan de Zeeuw

allegedly spitting juice at an 11-year-old Middlesbrough supporter during Bolton's 1-1 draw at The Riverside on November 7.

Alardyce sprung to his defence soon after that incident but was unforgiving last night after this latest shameful act.

SOUR

He said: "Bolton Wanders takes great pride in its family image and the incident has left a sour taste."

The player himself said he was sorry and embarrassed but Dutch defender de Zeeuw said: "He spat

right in my face and I felt like punching him.

"But I wasn't going to get myself sent off because we were leading."

"Apparently, that's normal behaviour with him."

They may be managerless but Pompey showed there is life after Harry Redknapp as they secured their first Premiership win at the Reebok in the absence of chairman Milan Mandaric, who was in hospital with a heart attack.

Couch Kevin Bond said: "The players showed tremendous character and got on with the job."

Milan backs honest 'Arry

by PETER WHITE

MILAN MANDARIC has angrily denied Harry Redknapp was responsible for millions of pounds being paid in agent fees on transfers during his spell as Portsmouth boss.

Mandaric said last night people were trying to drive a wedge between himself and Redknapp, insisting: "I have lost a good manager, now they are trying to make me lose a good friend."

On a business trip to Dubai, the Pompey chairman revealed in Redknapp's two-and-a-half-year reign, the club had forked out around £3m to agents. But he

claimed his comments had been "twisted", saying: "Harry was not only a good manager for us, he was totally honest as well."

Upset

"He had nothing to do with agents' fees. He would recommend players but the deals were carried out either by myself or our chief executive Peter Storrie."

"We authorised the payments, not Harry, and it is totally unfair to point the finger at him."

Mandaric added: "I am very

upset and annoyed at what has been suggested.

"When it came to transfers Harry always tried to get value for money and £3m is not a lot when you consider how many players have come and gone over the past couple of years."

Mandaric returns to England today to meet fellow directors, including the new director of football Vellimir Zajec, to discuss a successor for Redknapp.

Mandaric said: "We shall not be rushed. Much of the speculation about who will come in is very wide of the mark."

But last week's £400,000 capture of Rotherham's Chris Sedgwick and the arrival of Gillingham's Patrick Agyemang for a similar fee days before, have been a welcome boost.

And Alexander, whose two first-half goals set up an easy win, hopes they will not be the last.

Alexander said: "We have had a few knockbacks that I couldn't really understand because this is a great place to play football."

"I know the gaffer is still keen to bring in more players and make it a strong competitive squad."

"Chris has a lot of experience for a young lad and he slotted in straight away."

"Patrick is a big, strong lad with pace to burn who looks as though he could get a lot of goals for us."

Striker Richard Cresswell wrapped up a routine victory over a shocking Derby side.

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Becks is a Real stunner

SERIOUSLY
football

Moyes men continue to show stubborn streak

■ by PETE JENSON
Real Madrid 5 Levante 0

DAVID BECKHAM was back in his old position last night and back to his best scoring with a 35-yard screamer in Real Madrid's convincing victory.

Real followed the advice of Sven Goran Eriksson and moved the England captain back out to the right side of midfield and he responded by setting up the first goal for Ronaldo and scoring the fourth.

Skipped

Two minutes before half-time Beckham played a 25-yard pass perfectly into the path of Ronaldo, who shot home. Luis Figo made it two and Ronaldo added a third before Beckham skipped past former Leeds full-back Ian Harte to fire into the top left-hand corner.

Michael Owen came on as a 67th-minute sub and scored his seventh goal in 10 games from close range with four minutes left.

Former Chelsea striker Hernan Crespo scored the only goal in AC Milan's win over Chievo in Serie A.



BY THE RIGHT: Lee Carsley slams home Everton's equaliser

BAND AID 20 DO THEY KNOW IT'S CHRISTMAS?



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EVERTON provided emphatic proof that their flying start to the season is no flash in the pan with a display brimming with stubborn intent at St James's Park.

Few sides would have survived the assault Newcastle inflicted on them but there's a defiant streak running through David Moyes' side this season and with a combination of courage, commitment and a slice of luck, they earned a point which no-one would have thought possible as the Toon pummelled them into near-submission.

Craig Bellamy's stunning opener after just five minutes should have opened the floodgates and such was Newcastle's superiority for most of the first half it was hard to believe the over-stretched visitors were the team holding down third spot.

But Lee Carsley's 56th-minute equaliser kept Everton ten points clear of opponents who themselves have their sights firmly fixed on a Champions League slot at the end of the season.

Spirit

Graeme Souness' side at least ended a run of three successive home defeats and played with a verve which suggests they'll win a lot more than they lose in the months ahead.

But it was Everton's insatiable spirit which was the key yesterday and while they may lack the quality and flair of some of their rivals, few can match their work-rate and capacity to defy the odds.

Their confidence in the opening minutes was to prove their own fall. They almost scored when, from Tony Hibbert's telling cross, Marcus Bent's looping header dropped just wide. That persuaded Everton to be

DAVID MOYES last night declared that Europe is within Everton's reach after they maintained their best-ever start to a Premiership campaign. The Merseysiders are a whopping 14 points better off than they were 12 months ago after yesterday's gutsy draw at St James's Park.

Moyes admitted: "That's 30 points from 15 games and when you're averaging two points per game, you know what that means. No doubt Newcastle will be challenging for Europe and they're ten points behind us, so we've got to aim for that."

"We're not at their level yet but we'll give it a real good go. "We are not kidding ourselves. There's a long way to go and I don't want to set us up for a fall."

"Believe me, we are having to fight tooth and nail to get results but the team spirit is better than ever."

N-EVER SAY DIE

■ by IAN MURTAGH

Newcastle 1
Everton 1

far more open than Moyes would have liked and Newcastle quickly took advantage.

Bellamy was afforded too much space to latch on to a sublime return pass from Patrick Kluivert and home in on goal.

In the past, the Welshman has fluffed too many one-on-ones with the keeper but the manner in which he drew Nigel Martyn before finding the net with a crisp finish suggests he'll add plenty more to the nine goals he's bagged so far this season.

Newcastle were irresistible for the next half-hour. Martyn did well to push away a 35-yard free-kick from Laurent Robert and after another

exquisite pass by Kluivert, acting skipper Jermaine Jenas was brilliantly foiled by the veteran keeper.

Fortune, too, favoured Everton. Jenas was desperately unlucky to see the ball skim the bar following a spec-

tacular scissors kick and Martyn and Alan Stubbs somehow combined to keep out a Kluivert drive from close range after Alessandro Pistone's sloppy clearance.

But the closing minutes of the first half offered hope for Everton as the Toon backline began to creak.

Three times in as many minutes they might have scored with Shay Given smothering Stubbs' effort, Tim Cahill back-heeling wide from three yards and the Aussie again heading narrowly over following Carsley's quickly-taken throw-in.

Curled

Then Aaron Hughes conceded a free-kick on the edge of the Toon box. Up stepped Carsley and despite being confronted by a six-man wall, he curled a shot into the gaping space between Given and the upright.

Though Given redeemed himself with an alert save from Leon Osman, it was the home side who had the better chances late on.

And Souness must have known it was not going to be Newcastle's day when Kluivert feed up Bellamy whose goalbound shot struck Pistone on the back with Martyn stranded.

TEAMS

NEWCASTLE Given, Taylor, Bramble, Hughes, Bernard, Jones, Dyer, Bowyer (Ameobi 61); Robert, Bellamy, Kluivert, Suba, Milner, Ambrose, Brittain, Harper

EVERTON Martyn, Stubbs, Weir, Pistone, Cahill (Watson 86), Osman, Givens (60), Cahill, Kilbane, Bent (Ferguson 86), Sutton, McGehee, Williams

REF: N Barry

We can be Euro stars

DAVID MOYES last night declared that Europe is within Everton's reach after they maintained their best-ever start to a Premiership campaign.

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"Believe me, we are having to fight tooth and nail to get results but the team spirit is better than ever."

SERIOUSLY
football

Spurs strikers stop the rot

JERMAIN 'N FREDDIE IN JOL BREAK

by DANNY FULLBROOK
Tottenham.....2
Middlesbrough.....0

STRIKE duo Jermain Defoe and Middlesbrough self-destructing.

Another defeat for Spurs and Jol would have had presided over their seventh straight league defeat which would have equalled the club record set under Ossie Ardiles in 1994.

Second-half goals from Defoe and Kanoute stopped the rot, and lifted Spurs to a welcome 13th in the league. But it was hardly a convincing display.

Vicious

The turning point was Franck Queudrue's controversial sending-off.

It came out of nowhere, in the 40th minute, because up until that point it was hardly a dirty game.

The French defender lost control of the ball, and then jumped into a two-footed challenge to win the ball off countryman Noe Pamarot.

Referee Phil Dowd had his red card out of his pocket before you could say 'grease lightning'.

According to the letter of the law, Queudrue had to go, but it was hardly the most vicious of tackles and Pamarot shook off the knock quickly.

Boro's bench went mad, as they felt the decision was harsh, and George Boateng was booked as Queudrue's team-mates protested.

Boss Steve McClaren did not hold back as the full-time whistle went, marching onto the pitch to wag his finger at Dowd.

Fiery

As the official disappeared down the tunnel, a furious McClaren shouted at him: 'You were too quick, you had time to think and you should have thought about it.'

Queudrue is hardly a shrinking violet though. His tally now stands at six reds in three years.

It was a fiery end to a first half which matched the damp cold conditions at White Hart Lane.

For most of those 45 minutes Spurs looked like the away side.

But with Spurs enjoying a man advantage, they finally found the breakthrough in the 49th minute.

Pedro Mendes streaked down the right and his cross was inch-perfect for Defoe to run onto and steer past an exposed Mark Schwarzer.

It was Defoe's 10th goal



POINTING FINGER: McClaren confronts ref Dowd

TEAMS

TOTTENHAM: Robinson, Pamarot, King, Naybet, Owusu, Ricketts, Pedro Mendes, Carrick, Ziegler, Keane (Kanoute 68), Defoe. Subs: Pritchard, Redknapp, Davenport.

MIDDLESBROUGH: Schwarzer, McMehon (Reiziger 74), Southgate, Riggott, Queudrue, Parlour, Zenden, Boateng, Downing, Viduka (Nemeth 61), Hasselbaink. Subs: Nash, Doriva, Job. Ref: P Dowd.

of the season, and a strike his hard work deserved.

But his celebration – putting his shirt off to display a birthday message to a friend – earned him a booking.

It was his fifth of the season, and he will be suspended for the clash at Manchester City on Saturday week.

Spurs' second came when former Arsenal midfielder Ray Parlour – booted throughout – passed the ball back to Schwarzer who was immediately closed down by sub Kanoute.

Schwarzer connected well, but the ball rebounded off the French striker's thigh and into the goal.

Ref has Mac seeing red

From Back Page

challenge on Noe Pamarot. But Boro boss McClaren was furious with the decision and insisted Dowd acted too hastily.

Jermain Defoe and Freddie Kanoute scored the goals that avoided a seventh successive defeat for Spurs. But although manager Martin Jol was pleased with victory, he was angry for Defoe picking up a booking, and a subsequent suspension, for taking his shirt off after scoring.

McClaren said: 'The ref's decision cost us the game. Anybody who saw the first half-hour will know we were in control and dominated the game and there was only going to be one winner.'

Lucky

'Spurs got lucky on the day. It was a rash challenge from Queudrue, but in the context of the game it was not as if there had been three or four bad tackles before that.'

'He could have taken his time and cooled things down with a yellow instead of a red. We will appeal but he has cost us this game.'

Jol admitted Spurs were lucky and said: 'It is a terrific feeling to win. The sending-off was the turning point, but it was a cynical challenge with two feet.'

Information Station

FOOTBALL

Barclays Premiership

Liverpool (1).....2 Arsenal (0).....1

Alonso 41
Mellor 90

Newcastle (1).....1 Everton (0).....1

Bellamy 5

Tottenham (0).....2 Middlesbrough (0).....0

Dalo 49, Kanoute 76

Alt: 55,772

Torquay (0).....1 Colchester (0).....3

Gritten 74 pen

Alt: 2,984

SATURDAY

Birmingham (1).....1 Norwich (0).....1

Morrison 9

Alt: 29,120

Bolton (0).....0 Portsmouth (1).....1

De Zeeuw 45

Alt: 25,008

Charlton (0).....0 Chelsea (1).....4

Duff 4

Terry 47, 50

Gudjibon 59

Alt: 26,355

Fulham (0).....0 Blackburn (1).....2

Knight sent off

Alt: 19,163

Man City (2).....2 Aston Villa (0).....0

Macken 29

Wright-Phillips 38

Southampton (0).....2 C Palace (0).....2

Johnstone 5

Sheldrake 54

Alt: 31,323

West Brom (0).....0 Man Utd (0).....3

Sheldrake 53

Alt: 27,709

P W D L F A Pts

Chelsea.....15 11 3 1 2 7 6 36

Arsenal.....15 9 4 2 3 9 20 31

Man Utd.....15 6 6 2 19 12 30

Middlesbrough.....15 7 4 4 24 18 27

Aston Villa.....15 6 5 3 20 15 24

Liverpool.....14 7 2 5 23 16 23

Bolton.....15 6 5 4 22 19 23

Man City.....15 5 5 3 27 17 20

Newcastle.....14 5 3 6 18 20 18

Portsmouth.....14 5 3 6 17 17 27

Charlton.....15 5 3 7 17 17 27

Tottenham.....14 4 7 4 17 16 17

Burnley.....15 2 8 5 12 15 14

Crystal Palace.....15 3 4 8 17 23 13

Blackburn.....15 2 7 6 16 29 13

Southampton.....15 2 6 5 15 21 12

Norwich.....15 1 9 5 14 25 12

West Brom.....15 1 7 7 13 28 10

P W D L F A Pts

Aston Villa (0).....0 Millwall (0).....0

Blake 61 pen

Alt: 11,471

Coventry (0).....0 Crewe (1).....1

Ashton 26 pen

Alt: 12,823

Gillingham (0).....2 Notton For (1).....1

Henderson 76 pen

Taylor 14

Johnson 82

Alt: 6,784

Ipswich (1).....1 Brighton (0).....0

Kug 22

Alt: 26,269

Leicester (0).....2 Plymouth (1).....1

Scowcroft 49

Dublin 52

Alt: 23,799

Preston (2).....3 Derby (0).....0

Alexander 13 pen

Cresswell 88

Alt: 12,702

QPR (1).....1 Cardiff (0).....0

Shultz 23

Alt: 15,146

Reading (1).....1 Wigan (1).....1

Cwirski 42

Alt: 22,114

Sheff Utd (1).....3 Wolves (1).....3

Bromby 28, Thrwell 53

Alt: 18,946

Stoke (0).....0 Sunderland (0).....1

Bridges 63

Alt: 16,980

West Ham (2).....3 Watford (2).....2

Gunnarsson 5, Dyer 21

Reo-Coker 28, Powell 21

Alt: 24,541

P W D L F A Pts

Ipwich.....12 1 6 3 40 23 42

Wigan.....11 8 2 3 26 15 41

Sunderland.....12 4 5 29 15 40

Reading.....12 5 5 19 29 38

QPR.....12 1 6 3 29 15 38

West Ham.....12 4 5 26 15 38

Sheffield (0).....1 Oldham (1).....3

Kilburn 12, 22, 61, 69, 83

Summerbee sent off

Alt: 6,647

Bristol City (0).....1 Sheff Wed (1).....4

Parkhouse 15, 63

Coles sent off

Alt: 14,852

Chesterfield (0).....1 Swindon (0).....0

Allen 63

Alt: 2,444

Hartlepool (1).....3 Bournemouth (2).....2

Holmes 34, Stock 45

Appling 90

Alt: 4,376

Huddersfield (1).....1 Wrexham (1).....2

Schofield 41

Alt: 11,127

Hull (1).....2 Brentford (0).....0

Alt: 2,444

Northwich 1 Halifax 2, Stevenage 2 Forest G, 2 York 2 Carlisle 1.

FOOTBALL

Barclays Premiership

Luton (0).....1 Doncaster (0).....1

Roberts 82

Alt: 8,142

Peterborough (1).....4 Port Vale (0).....0

Alt: 3,785

Stockport (0).....0 Walsall (1).....1

Wuck 14

Alt: 4,448

Torquay (0).....1 Colchester (0).....3

Gritten 74 pen

Alt: 5,772

Saturday (1).....1 Birmingham (1).....1

Hall 53

Alt: 8,402

Tranmere (0).....1 Hall 53

Alt: 8,402

Walsall (0).....1 Hall 53

Alt: 8,402

Walsall sent off

Alt: 8,402

Port Vale (0).....1 Hall 53

</

SERIOUSLY
football

Kop hail new hero as young striker hits devastating

AMAZING
STRIKE
STUNS
WENGER

from Back Page
In 55 league matches, but also their second in their last six in the Premiership.

They've won just one league game in that run and trail Chelsea by five points.

Boss Arsene Wenger refused to look as far forward to the Highbury crunch with Chelsea on Sunday week, insisting: "We have three important games before them."

And he claimed: "I am not really too concerned about what Chelsea are doing, I am more concerned with us getting back on track. We have to regroup and find our way back to our best form."

He added: "We are not incisive enough. I do not think there is too much wrong but when you lose the errors are highlighted.

"Liverpool played very well. They were very organised, quicker to the ball than us and although their winner was brilliant from their point of view, for us it was a bad goal."

But Liverpool were buoyant and captain Steven Gerrard is confident they will clinch a Champions League spot next season.

Higher

He said: "There is no talk of just getting a top-four place - we are aiming higher than that."

But delighted manager Rafael Benitez, who had seen his side lose their previous two games, seems slightly less confident than his skipper and would be happy if one of those top four Champions League qualifying places can be clinched.

He said: "Before the game I was sure of getting there. Now I am even more sure that we can finish in the top four. It was an important win for us.

"This win is important for our confidence, having a victory over a team like Arsenal. We set out to control the game and that's the way it worked out."

Xabi Alonso scored Liverpool's first with Vieira equalising before Mellor's late, late winner.

The 22-year-old Mellor, thrust into the team through injuries, said of his first-ever Premiership goal: "To score in front of the Kop against one of the top teams in Europe is just a dream. We deserved the win."

And his team-mate Gerrard said of his contribution: "Neil deserved his goal. He'll be dreaming of that for years and years and he deserved it because he ran his legs off."

Gerrard added: "The game plan was to stop Arsenal playing and pressure their back four and it worked. We went in a goal up at half-time but then Arsenal came back at us.

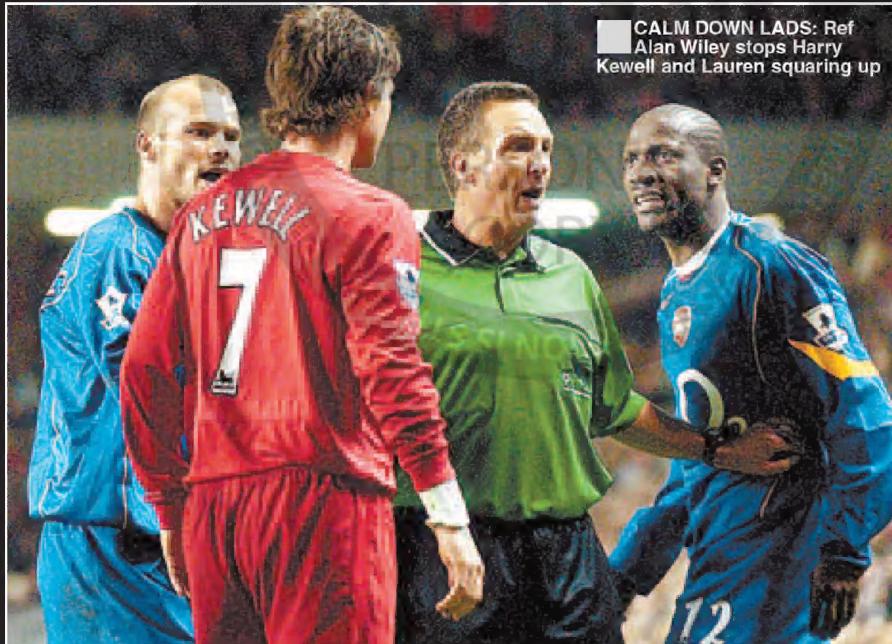
"We went into it with the right attitude and hopefully this will be the turning point of the season."



SWEET MELL OF SUCCESS:
Neil Mellor is mobbed by his team-mates

Pics: JOHN DAWES

MELL OF A



CALM DOWN LADS: Ref Alan Wiley stops Harry Kewell and Lauren squaring up

NEIL MELLOR struck just five seconds from the end of injury time to give Liverpool the victory they richly deserved.

The 22-year-old striker, who struggled to get a game when he was loaned to West Ham last season, rapped in a blistering 22-yard right-foot shot for his first Premiership goal.

It gave Liverpool a dramatic victory just when the champions thought they had escaped with a point.

Mellor, thrust into the striking role because of injuries at Anfield, scored twice in the recent Carling Cup win over Middlesbrough and chose the perfect moment to make his mark again.

Liverpool had been on top throughout, scoring in the first half through Xabi Alonso before Patrick Vieira, against the run of play, equalised after the break.

Class

The 41st minute opener came when Didi Hamann broke down an Arsenal attack and slipped the ball to Steve Finnan whose 40-yard crossfield ball was delicately headed into the path of Steven Gerrard by Harry Kewell.

Gerrard then pushed the ball into the path of Alonso with the outside of his right foot - a real touch of class from the England man.

Alonso, with plenty of space around him, sent a fierce shot from the edge of the penalty area to the left of the diving Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann.

It was just reward for a determined Liverpool side that had entered the match off the back of two successive defeats and were the bookies' underdogs for the clash despite home advantage.

last-gasp goal to put wobbling Arsenal on the Merseyside



AL FOR ONE:
Xabi Alonso
grabs Liverpool's
first goal



BLOW, GUNS



by KEVIN
FRANCIS

Liverpool 2
Arsenal 1

But the fact that even a stuttering Arsenal side should never be written off was perfectly illustrated when they drew level with their first real opening of the game in the 57th minute.

And it came after Liverpool had been pegging them in their own half from the restart and looked by far the better team and the one most likely to score again.

But Arsenal had other ideas and their goal came thanks to a lovely piece of flowing football and pinpoint passing.

Captain Vieira started and finished it, giving the ball initially to Thierry Henry as the Gunners moved menacingly upfield.

After Henry, the ball went to Robert Pires who then laid it off to Vieira who by then was deep inside the penalty area and made his tap-in of a goal look simplicity itself.

That goal was the signal for the 'real' Arsenal to stand up and, all of a sudden, Liverpool were the team under pressure as Arsene Wenger's men sensed victory.

Liverpool once again had Mellor ploughing something of a lone furrow up front for a team shorn of regular strikers, Djibril

Cisse and Milan Baros, through injury. But although he was lacking company, he certainly could not be accused of lacking spirit.

Mellor was always ready to burst forward whenever the opportunity arose, more often than not courtesy of some excellent passes from Gerrard.

It was Gerrard who gave rise to some early Liverpool optimism when he produced one of his typical, barnstorming runs from midfield in the third minute.

But his path to goal was abruptly stopped when he half evaded a challenge from Kolo Toure but then tumbled to the ground.

Television replays clearly showed that Toure's right boot had caught Gerrard and that caused his speedy run to come to a rather unhappy end.

But there was no penalty given despite heated protests from Liverpool.

Delirious

Hamann, one of the Liverpool stars of the match, set up Alonso for a goal attempt after 14 minutes but his 25-yard shot, although powerfully hit, went well wide of Lehmann's right-hand post.

He was later forgiven for that one by the delirious fans who celebrated his goal.

Liverpool had plenty of other scoring opportunities in the first half.

One fell to Kewell who was presented with the opportunity of ending a run stretching back 32 matches without finding the back of the net.

Defender Finnan bent down the right wing and sent over a cross deep into the box where the in-running Aussie headed goalwards, only to see keeper Lehmann leap high to collect the ball under the bar.

While all of this Liverpool attacking was taking place, Arsenal were unable to play their usual, free-flowing and highly-attractive game with Henry very limited in his forward runs.

In fact, Liverpool goalkeeper Chris Kirkland was very under-employed in the opening 45 minutes as the home fans roared their approval of a home team which took the lead to the Gunners at every conceivable opportunity.

And the pressure contained many touches of class, too, giving Liverpool's fans plenty to shout about.

Gerrard, now hitting something like top form after returning from injury two games before this clash, was inspirational and worked tirelessly.

He came desperately close to scoring in the 74th minute after one mazy, left wing run saw him cut into the penalty area before firing low into the side netting.

Two minutes later, from just outside the box, he sent in another goalbound sizzler which Lehmann punched away after diving to his right.

But Arsenal were still a danger in their rare attacks and one long-range lob from Henry whistled over the bar.

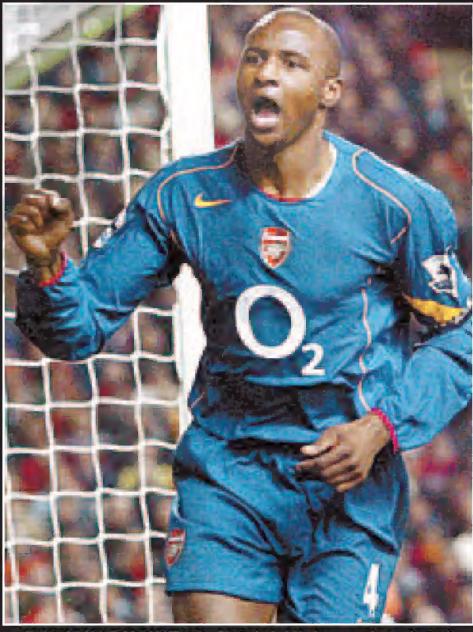
His frustration was clear and just a minute later he was booked by referee Alan Wiley for bundling over Alonso.

TEAMS

LIVERPOOL: Kirkland, Finnan, Hyypia, Carragher, Riise, Gerrard, Alonso, Hamann, Kewell, Mellor, Sinama Pongolle (Nunez 69), Subs: Dudek, Diao, Biscan, Warnock.

ARSENAL: Lehmann, Lauren, Toure, Campbell, Cole, Ljungberg, Vieira, Fabregas, Pires, Reyes (Van Persie 67), Henry. Subs: Flaminio, Senderos, Almunia, Hoyte.

REF: A Wiley.



BACK IN BUSINESS: Patrick Vieira makes it 1-1

